

Maurice Hinchey NEWS

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HINCHEY TELLS ENERGY SECRETARY EFFICIENCY BUDGET MUST BE BOOSTED

WASHINGTON - U. S. Representative Maurice Hinchey (NY-22) grilled U.S. Energy Secretary Spencer Abraham at an Interior Appropriations Subcommittee hearing today. A member of the subcommittee, Hinchey took Abraham and the Bush Administration to task for shortchanging energy efficiency programs in the proposed budget for fiscal year 2004.

"It is astounding to me that you are proposing to cut energy efficiency programs at a time when gas prices and heating bills are skyrocketing," Hinchey said during his questioning of Abraham. "If the administration were really serious about addressing our energy independence and helping consumers, they wouldn't be cutting the budget for these important programs."

Abraham was appearing before the subcommittee to present the Department of Energy's proposed budget. The Energy Conservation Budget, which is under the jurisdiction of the Interior Appropriations Subcommittee, is reduced by \$22 million below the 2003 level in the Bush Administration's proposal. While weatherization assistance grants are slated for a \$63 million increase, energy efficiency research is cut by \$85 million to pay for that increase and to achieve the lower funding level overall. Abraham touted the administration's Freedom Car program, but under questioning acknowledged that it would not result in commercialization of hydrogen fuel cell vehicles and infrastructure until at least 2015 or later.

Non-fuel cell, non-weatherization programs at the Department of Energy are cut by more than 20 percent in the president's budget request. This shift in funding largely shortchanges proven efficiency programs that help move the country toward energy independence in the short term.

"Economic and energy security are a vital part of our overall national security, yet there is nothing in this budget to address the problems of today," Hinchey continued. "The administration's budget is completely lacking in a short-term plan to help insulate Americans from current price shocks in gasoline, natural gas, and other fuels. At the same time the administration estimates a cost of war with Iraq to be \$100 billion, it refuses to devote the necessary resources to make the United States energy independent."